

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the purpose of this project?

Douglas County is conducting a countywide agricultural resource lands study to determine if there are properties currently designated as:

- Agricultural resource lands on the comprehensive plan land use and zoning map which could be considered for redesignation to rural
- Rural on the comprehensive plan land use map and zoning map which could be considered for redesignation to agricultural resource lands

What is the project schedule

Douglas County will begin a technical and GIS-based review of agricultural land conditions until summer 2026. An early opportunity to learn about the project will be provided between February and March of 2026 while the County is working on technical analysis review. In the summer, the County will engage with stakeholders, local experts and community members to help understand the local conditions applicable to the analysis. Toward the end of the year, a draft report will be released for public review and discussion. In 2027, the County will finalize the report, consider next steps—including possible changes to land use policies—and provide additional opportunities for public input before any decisions are made.

What does “agricultural resource lands” mean?

Agricultural resource lands are areas that:

- Are not characterized by urban growth (WAC 365-196-310).
- Are used or capable of agricultural production, based on soil quality and physical characteristics.
- Have long-term commercial significance for agriculture, considering factors like soil classification, proximity to markets, and infrastructure.

What does “rural lands” mean?

Rural lands means “all lands which are not within an urban growth area and are not designated as natural resource lands having long-term commercial significance for production of agricultural products, timber, or the extraction of minerals.”

Why is a countywide study being conducted before the county considers any comprehensive plan and zoning map changes?

State law permits designating and de-designating agricultural resource lands where a countywide analysis is conducted. Considering map changes on a parcel-by-parcel analysis without first conducting a countywide analysis is not permitted.



The decision to designate or de-designate agricultural resources lands must be based upon the criteria found within Washington Administrative Code (WAC) [365-190-040\(10\)](#), [365-190-050](#) and [365-196-310](#).

Douglas County will be preparing a report, based upon the WAC criteria, to assist in determining future land use map and zoning map changes the Board of County Commissioners may consider in the future.

When and how will stakeholders be engaged on this project?

Early stakeholder engagement opportunities are planned for summer 2026 before the first draft report is released. This will community members and technical experts' opportunity to inform the County about on-the-ground conditions applicable to the report. Opportunities to participate will be provided throughout the rest of the project. The project website will be updated periodically when new opportunities for engagement are scheduled.

By initiating this project, does this mean the County will be making land use and zoning map changes?

No. The first step is to complete the agricultural resources lands study and complete initial stakeholder engagement. Once both are completed, the Board of County Commissioners will decide if any land use map and zoning map changes are warranted and will be considered. If changes are considered, there will be additional opportunities to provide comments during public meetings and hearings on those specific changes.

Once the report is complete, how quickly will changes be considered?

Any changes which are considered will require amendments to the comprehensive plan land use map. Under the Growth Management Act (GMA), the comprehensive plan may only be amended once per year in most circumstances. Douglas County has a process for evaluating comprehensive plan changes which is outlined in.

While it is anticipated that the agricultural resource lands study and initial stakeholder engagement will occur in 2026, any comprehensive plan land use map and zoning map changes will be considered as part of the annual comprehensive plan amendment process in 2027.

What is the process which will be utilized to determine if comprehensive plan and zoning map changes will be considered?

There are several steps which will determine if land use and zoning maps will be considered by the Board of County Commissioners. Each step will also include community and stakeholder engagement. The following is a high-level overview of the project steps:



1. Prepare initial countywide agricultural resource lands study through application of the criteria outlined in [WAC 365-190](#) and [WAC 365-195](#).
2. Refine initial study findings through engagement with stakeholders such as landowners, agricultural community, and agencies such as the Natural Resources Conversation District (NRCS). Working together with stakeholders will provide an opportunity to discuss initial findings and work to obtain more specific data to inform land use and zoning map changes which may be considered by the Board of County Commissioners.
3. Based upon initial and refined study findings, the project team will provide report findings and options for the Board of County Commissioners to consider.
4. Based upon initial feedback from the Board of County Commissioners, land use and zoning map changes may be considered as part of the 2027 Comprehensive Plan amendments.

If land use and zoning map changes are considered in 2027, there will be numerous opportunities to engage and provide comments to the Douglas County Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners as part of that legislative process. You can learn more about this process by review Douglas County Code 14.32.

Will this project result in the expansion of any Urban Growth Area (UGA)?

No. This project is solely focused on completing a countywide agricultural lands study. The result of this study may result in land use and zoning map changes. This may include lands currently designated as agricultural resource lands being designated as rural lands or rural lands being designated agricultural resource lands. The changes considered by the Board of County Commissioners will depend on the results of the study.

Modifications to Urban Growth Area (UGA) boundaries require a separate process, coordination with the affected city or cities and community members and stakeholders. There are also separate requirements to be met for the UGA boundary change to meet Douglas County code and state law.

What is the general difference between having an agricultural resource land versus rural comprehensive plan land use and zoning designation?

It depends. There are several different agricultural resource land and rural land use map and zoning map designations across Douglas County. See link to zoning maps below in the next question. Therefore, the impact of a map change would depend on the current and proposed zoning. However, areas with rural land use and zoning designations typically allow more uses than those designated as agricultural resource lands. In



Douglas County allowed densities are very similar between agricultural resources and rural lands.

One difference is the size of accessory uses. While uses in rural areas must be aligned and be consistent with the rural character of the county, the size of uses is not typically restricted.

For agricultural resource lands, the GMA allows non-agricultural resource uses and activities on agricultural resource lands if they are consistent with the size, scale, and intensity of the existing agricultural use of the property and the existing buildings on the site. Further, new buildings, parking, or supportive uses, must be located within the general area already developed and shall not otherwise convert more than one acre of agricultural land to nonagricultural uses ([RCW 36.70A.177](#)).

If specific land use and zoning map changes are considered later in the project, there will be more specific information available about the similarities and differences between existing and proposed land use and zoning map changes.

Where can I find the current Rural Douglas County Comprehensive Plan map and zoning map?

All reference maps may be found on the Douglas County website. A link is provided [here](#).

Where can I learn more about this project?

For up-to-date information about the project, project schedule, and opportunities to participate, please check the Douglas County website Land Services page.

Who should I contact if I have any questions?

If you have any questions, please contact Douglas County Principal Planner, Tanner Ackley. His email address is tackley@co.douglas.wa.us

